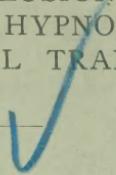


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CURRENT DELUSIONS RE-
LATING TO HYPNOTISM
(ARTIFICIAL TRANCE).



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Current Delusions Relating to Hypnotism (Artificial Trance.)

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UNDER this head, I will endeavor to indicate briefly, and, if possible, clearly, some of the errors in regard to the artificial form of trance popularly known as hypnotism, that just now prevail among scientific students of this subject, both in Europe and America.

The popular delusions on this subject, of which magnetism and animal magnetism are the most familiar, are now passing away—have, indeed, already become historic—but there remain, even with some of the best of the special workers in this line, a number of other and almost as serious delusions, which must be dissipated before trance, in all its phenomena and numerous scientific and practical relations, becomes appreciated and understood.

For the sake of clearness—to know just where we stand—a few definitions may be repeated here.

First—Trance is the concentration of nervous force in some one direction, with corresponding suspension of

nervous force in other directions. It is subdivided into natural and artificial forms.

Second—Natural trance, that which comes on through natural causes, is, like insanity, variously subdivided into cataleptic trance, somnambulistic trance, alcoholic trance, intellectual trance, emotional trance, etc.

Third—Artificial trance, popularly called “hypnotism.”

One law governs all these varieties of trance, natural and artificial. One theory, the *concentration theory*, explains and unifies them all. He who has experienced or witnessed an ordinary attack of absent-mindedness and understands it thoroughly in all that it suggests, understands the philosophy of trance natural and artificial, and in all varieties and sub-varieties.

The delusions now prevailing on this subject among specialists in this line of study are as follows:

First—That the artificial variety of trance, so-called hypnotism, is something distinct from the natural varieties, such as somnambulistic, ecstatic, intellectual, epileptic, cataleptic trance, etc. Although it is seven years since it was demonstrated in my work on “Trance” that all the varieties of this condition, whether produced naturally or artificially, were simply sub-divisions of a general state analogous to the sub-divisions of epilepsy, hysteria, or insanity, yet this fact seems to be only beginning to be understood; and only by a few of the most advanced and liberal investigators. Writers speak of the artificial variety as something different from the general state, just as they would speak of the different varieties of insanity as something distinct from general insanity. Insanity may be artificially produced in various ways, just as trance can be produced artificially. If we make a man drunk with alcohol, we produce a case of artificial insanity the symptoms of which resemble many cases of natural insanity; if we put a man out of his head by fright, we may also in some cases produce a case of artificial insanity, and it is the same in principle as the natural varieties of insanity. An attack of drunkenness, then, is

to insanity what an attack of hypnotism is to trance. Artificial trance may be produced in ways innumerable. In this country we are mostly familiar with artificial trance caused by exciting the emotion of *expectation*; and it is incomparably the best way for a scientific study of this subject; but the method of Braid, now used in Europe, the method of Mesmer, used before Braid, or the method of Von Helmont, and scores of others used before Mesmer's time, produced the same phenomena, though in quality and variety far less satisfactory for scientific purposes.

Secondly.—That it is necessary for the operator to do anything, or cause the subject to do anything, in order to produce this artificial trance, so-called hypnotism.

Nothing astonished the European experts in the case I exhibited so much as the fact that he entered the trance state and came out of it without anything being done, either by himself or by anybody else. A method I often used was to have the subject sit down before a clock or watch, and tell him at such a time he was to enter into the trance state, and at such a time to come out of it; meanwhile I might not be in the room or near it; it would make no difference with the results if we were thousands of miles apart.

It is beginning to be comprehended by a few of the best European investigators that this can be done with trained subjects, that is, those trained through the emotion of expectation; but it seems not to be comprehended that this is the best of all ways to train cases for the purposes of scientific study. It may in some instances take a longer time than some other of the myriad methods that have been used, but the results are infinitely more varied and satisfactory, and it makes it possible to devise experiments in such variety and quantity as assure ourselves that the subject is not deceiving us, either intentionally or unintentionally.*

*It is this very phenomena that causes those who are unfamiliar with trance to suspect that the subject is not genuine. Such an inference is natural, indeed almost inevitable, to those who have not thoroughly and experimentally investigated this department of science.

Thirdly.—In assuming that persons who are entranced artificially are necessarily liable to the natural varieties of trance, and also that they are liable to be injured thereby in mind or body.

There is common belief that good subjects for these experiments are those who are, or have been, epileptic, anæmic, hysterical or insane. This belief, which is mostly an erroneous one, prevails all over Europe and in this country also, except among those who have given much time and thought to investigation of this subject. Prof. Preyer, of Jena, who is working faithfully; and successively in this department, on witnessing the experiments, repeatedly urged me to desist or to be more moderate lest the subject should be injured. Trance produced by acting on the emotion of expectation is a purely psychological, not a physical state, and has not necessarily any relation to physical health, whether good or bad. The Jumpers of Maine are strong and long-lived. I have experimented with persons of different ages, of both sexes, white and black, old and young, and the majority, though not all of the very best subjects for the average of experiments and for the most interesting experiments, are of firm or medium health, and it is on this class that for scientific purposes, I prefer to experiment. Nervous, feeble, hysterical women, who are made subjects of these experiments, and become frightened or alarmed in regard to them, may become temporarily and, possibly, in rare cases permanently injured thereby. The *possibility* of this, on theoretical grounds, I will allow, but I must say, that in my own personal experience extending over many years, in which I have made many thousands of experiments on hundreds of different individuals, I have never known of one being permanently injured thereby; a few temporary disturbances, lasting over a few hours or days, have been the only unpleasant results I have witnessed, and these due almost always to the inexperience of the experimenter. This is the position which the psychological science of the future is to take on this subject.

I have watched persons who have been in the habit of entering this state, off and on, for years, and if any one of these cases should at any time become insane, it would take very much evidence to convince me that such experiments had been the cause of their insanity.

Even traveling performers, who, as a rule, know nothing of psychology, however expert they may be in their practical performances, rarely do any harm to the cases on whom they may experiment; and they usually, if not always, have a certain proportion of delicate women among their subjects. On the contrary, I have seen many who have been benefited in various ways by these experiments, and all the claims made by Mr. Braid on this subject are verified and more than verified.

I dwell on this question with special earnestness, for it has been stated that in Germany experiments have been stopped by the Government, and there is a probability that scientific investigators may be crippled in their study of this subject, as they have already been in the study of animals. The popular oppositions to vivisection, to dissection and to vaccination are far more scientific, more wise, and have a better foundation in reason than the opposition to the experimental study of trance in human beings.

Fourth.—That there is no way of proving the genuineness of the phenomena of artificial trance, but that we must take it entirely on our faith in the truthfulness of the person operated upon.

In a recent paper, Richet has said that the only way to convince ourselves of the genuineness of this state is to go into it ourselves. Is it impossible for any one to know that there is such a disease as insanity unless he himself becomes insane? Must then every expert in insanity be himself a lunatic? Must every psychologist who testifies in regard to questions in lunacy before a court of justice be dismissed as an incompetent witness unless he can prove that he has been a patient in an asylum?

Not only do we have as much proof of the genuineness of the phenomena of artificial trance as we have of any of those of insanity, but we have far better and more convincing proofs than can be acquired of insanity where we suspect simulation. To develop these tests has been, indeed, the labor of years, and they will be described in detail in my work on trance. They can be mastered by any psychologist who will give as much time to this subject as is necessary to become familiar with lunacy or with nervous diseases in general. In some cases, a long series of experiments of different kinds, repeated over and over again, under different conditions, not in the presence of audiences but alone, or with a few earnest coöoperators, as in all branches of science, are needed to assure ourselves absolutely and beyond all question that we are dealing with a genuine, not a pretended case. No person, however skillful in this department, or however large his experience may be, can tell from witnessing a number of experiments whether they are genuine or not. The genuineness of the case which I had in London had been proved here through months of labor by myself and others. In London I used him merely to illustrate certain new discoveries that had been made during the year; although, familiar experiments were repeated.

When, two years ago, Charcot showed me one of his interesting cases of artificial trance, I asked him whether he had convinced himself that the case was genuine, he replied that he had, that he had spent much time in investigating; and I had, and have no doubt that he was quite right; but although I was myself allowed to make experiments with the same subject, I did not regard all the phenomena as demonstrative. So when Prof. Preyer, of Jena, called to see my subject, and asked if I had convinced myself of the reality of the phenomena, I replied that I had, and he then witnessed the experiments with Mr. Braid and Mr. Romaines.

This is the true position of science on this subject,

and it cannot be insisted on too frequently, or with too much emphasis.

Fifth.—That the failures in any subject are evidences or suggestions of deception.

Years ago I was myself a victim to this delusion, at least to a degree, and was only emancipated by independent reasoning and study.

Failures are rather a sign of sincerity, while uniform successes at all times and under all circumstances might give reason for a suspicion that there is shamming, unless there is positive evidence to the contrary.

I have had opportunity in my life to study a large number of cases of sham trance, and the rule is that they succeed in what they attempt; if there is a doubt about their not being able to succeed, they are not likely to make the attempt. Genuine cases, like those that have been used by me in Europe and America before scientific men, are very likely to fail or to act unevenly. We cannot always depend upon them, even in those phenomena that can be readily simulated without any training whatever. There are atmospheric reasons for this, as there are climatic reasons for the fact that artificial trance is more easily produced in this country than in Europe, and that the opportunities for studying it are better here, probably, than in any other part of the world. The nearest approach to the cases I have lately studied and exhibited in America and Europe in the rapidity and suddenness of going into trance and out of it, are some of those on whom Charcot performs his experiments in Salpêtrière. But in Charcot's trained cases some procedure, as holding up a pencil, or staring or looking at a light or bright object, are employed. In my cases nothing is done. Simply the emotion of expectation is acted upon, and the subjects are not hysterical or nervous, but, as a rule, strong, healthy and active.

Sixth.—Neglecting to make a distinction between the *positive* and *negative* symptoms of artificial trance.

This distinction is fundamental to the philosophic

study of this side of science. By negative symptoms I mean those that appear negatively, spontaneously, as an incidental result of the hypnotic condition, however produced, and without any suggestion from any source whatever, or any expectation on the part of the subject.

These negative symptoms, such as sleep in its various grades, modifications of the special senses, either exaltation or depression, are the chief features in Mr. Braid's researches; and the best analysis of these negative phenomena of trance is to be found in the latest edition of Prof. Preyer's work on the "History of Hypnotism," which contains a *résumé* of what Mr. Braid did, including some manuscript not before published, which has been given me by a relative of Mr. Braid's family, and which I placed in Prof. Preyer's hands.

The *positive* phenomena of trance, those which take place by direct suggestion, and take place simply because the subject *expects* them to do so and which are infinite, in a well-trained subject, including abolition, exaltation, and manifestation of the senses, special or general, have not been extensively studied in Europe, and are rarely referred to, even by the most recent writers.

These positive symptoms are the most important phenomena of artificial trance.

Seventh.—That the will of the operator is an essential factor in these phenomena.

The vitality of this delusion is very great indeed, although it was apparently destroyed a long time since. I find it as active in Europe among those who had not studied the subject thoroughly as in America. I found it necessary to do there as I do here, go out of the room for a short time and leave others to carry on the experiments, simply by way of proof that I had nothing whatever to do with the matter, and to show them that all that was done could be done without my presence, and that any person or thing in whom the subject has confidence, so that the emotion of expectation can be influenced, serves the purpose of an operator.

"The world does move," but the people that dwell upon it tremble as it moves, fearing lest its centrifugal force may hurry it to destruction. Our present theme, the interaction of mind and body, has been the terror of not a few amiable and timid non-experts in both hemispheres; and solemn editorials in able journals are praying scientific investigators to stop where they are lest we learn too much of the secrets of the nervous system; and are exhorting young men to stand fast by the old truths that our dear fathers and mothers of the middle ages found so useful and loved so well. But all this terror comes too late; the work has been done; the discoveries have been made; both the peril and the investigation are nearly over; what we now hear is not the rising but the retiring storm; henceforth, for our time and for all time, this branch of science shall quietly take its place in the ranks of psychology, side by side with hysteria, epilepsy and insanity, all of which diseases gained their admission only after long years of doubt, denial and delay.

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